

[W. L. Rhodes]

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Folkstuff - Rangelore

Phipps, Woody

Rangelore

Tarrant Co., Dist. #7 [103?]

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W.L. Rhodes, 65, was born on his father's stock farm in Ga., where he learned to ride horses at an early age. When he was 9, his family moved to Kaufman Co., Tex., where his father established a farm. P.G. Bacon, who operated a ranch near the farm, employed Rhodes as a herder during roundups. When he was 12, Bacon employed him as a regular cowboy. Rhodes quit the range when he was 17, to work for the Trinity Const. Co., of Trinidad, Tex. After he was 40 Yrs. old, he bought 150 acres near Trinidad, and established a ranch. He now breeds and deals in fine cattle on this ranch, and resides there. His story:

"The best time I ever had in my life was when I lived and worked on the range. The healthies life ever was, because you only eat wholesome food, stay out in the open all the time, eating and sleeping out there, and the work is hard enough, and interesting enough to keep a feller at it regular.

"Now, I wasn't born on a ranch. I was born on my dad's stock farm, somewhere in Ga., on Aug. 26, 1872. Dad just had enough cows and hosses to get it under the wire as a stock

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farm, but it was enough that I learnt to ride a hoss pretty good mighty early. I reckon I could set a saddle right pert soon after I was only four years old. While that wasn't nothing to kids them days, it'd be something these days.

"I was somewhere around nine years old when my dad made up his mind to move to Texas, and when we did, we settled in Kaufman Co. Dad didn't bring no stock with him, and he just farmed after we got settled down. That didn't suit me so well, so I looked around and got me a job riding herd on the P.G. Bacon Ranch.

"The way they worked it, was they'd work up a small herd, and I'd keep it from straggling or running off. Then when they had what they wanted, we'd drive them into the main herd where everybody else were driving their's. C.12 - 2/11/41 - Texas 2 You see, in a roundup, all the ranchers generally get together and all work together in rounding all the, cattle in that part of the country up, then they cut out what belonged to them. While the ranchers in this part of the country were straight as a string, some ranchers in other parts of the country would pay big wages to cowboys who'd go in there and slap their iron on every unbranded critter they come across. The rule was to bring in everything, regardless of brand or unbranded. Then, there were brands that could be made into other brands by adding some to the brand already on the critter. Like this. You take the old ' PO ' spread in Shackelford Co., and nearly all their stock was gone before they woke up to what was going on. Some never did miss their's 'til it was too late, but on the PO, a rustler changed their iron to the 'R8,' like this: PO to R8.

"Now, when that was caught up with, there was some shooting, and when the dust and smoke cleared away, the rustler had paid for taking another man's property. Not always did these things end up that way because the rustler expected gun play, and usually picked on somebody they figured they could beat. Then again, the best shots usually died with gun shot in them in the end.

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"Back to me now. I worked in these roundups every Spring and Fall, and helped brand, and everything else my weight would let me do. Between nine and 12, I gradually picked up roping and on my riding ability 'til Bacon hired me as a regular cow puncher when I got to my 12. While just working extra in the roundups, I got 50¢ a day, but when he put me on regular, my first salary was \$10.00 a month and chuck. By the time I was 15, I got top hand's pay, which was \$25.00 a month with chuck and all my riding string furnished. I always had from six to eight good hosses in my string, with anyway a couple of them a good deal better than the rest in cutting.

"You see, a cutting hoss is as important to a cow poke a hammer is to a carpenter. If your hoss is trained right, and is a good hoss to start with, you can go into the herd, and the critter you want out of the herd, you just have the hoss push against it, or hit it with your lasso. Then your hoss will stay behind that critter 'til it gets out of the herd, and will chase it plum through the herd if necessary.

"Then when you get the critter out of the herd, you cast your lasso, and again if your hoss has been trained right and is a good hoss, he'll know just the right time when to sit down on his haunches. That way, the rope'll throw your critter, and you'll be able to ride up to it and tie it up before it can get away again if [yourre?] by yourself. Usually, though, several cow pokes work together when there's roping to be done, and when one throws a critter, the other is near enough to finish tying it up.

In fact, nearly all the work I done while on the range was while some other rider was with me.

"Along about when I was 15 years old, there was a serious drouth come over the country, and the grass was short. Bacon decided to move his herd West to the long grass section in Throckmorton Co., around a 100 Mi. from his ranch. Well, we rounded the cattle up, and started on our trip. The first 50 Mi. of any trail drive is always the hardest because the cattle want to break back to the country they're used to. We sure had to haze a many a

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one back before we got the herd used to moving. In fact, we had to drive it 4 'til the cattle were almost ready to drop before they'd break back. We had four or five miles I reckon, of stragglers, and some of them got back to the ranch, I know, because they were sleek and fat when we came back the next year. You see, where there weren't so many to eat what little grass there was, the ones on it done a whole lot better.

"The drive passed right by Fort Worth, and we made the Trinity River crossing right back of where the court house now stands. Not exactly in back, but there's a shallows there, where cattle and hosses could ford.

"We veered the herd a little North to keep from having to cross the Brazos River, and passed just South of where Graham, Tex. is now. Well, sir. The durndest thing ever you heard of, happened right there. The first evening after we left the Brazos, I reckon it was about eight miles, a couple of house cats went to fighting, and stampeded that herd: House cats! They sure caused us a heap of trouble because we were two days rounding that herd up again.

"We spotted the herd where California Creek forks the Clear Fork on the Brazos River, and stayed there 'til June after Spring roundup time the next year, then we drove the herd back to near Crandall, in Kaufman co. That was where we'd started from in the first place, but Crandall was just beginning to be something more then a spot for a General Merchandise store when we got back.

"Just before the Fall roundup after we got the herd back to Kaufman, Jeff Bowdry brought a herd through from somewhere N. of the Rio Grande Valley. I reckon he had around 3,000 head of stockers in his herd, and he must have had 20 different brands in the herd. Well, you know how it is. In cow country, a man's 5 business is his own 'til he gets ready to spill it. There's only one exception to that rule, and that's when he bother's another cowman. Then, he makes it both of them's business. What I'm trying to show you here, is

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that him having so many irons in his herd made it look kind of queer because it'd be hard to get that many different cattlemen together to send a herd up the trail.

"Bacon decides it might be a good idea to have the roundup right then, so we started out. We worked and worked, but sure enough. Just what we didn't want to happen, come about. We weren't rounding up as many head as we expected to. About a week after Bowdry had gone through, Bacon come out a-stomping and raring. He says, ' That so and so Bowdry put some of my beef in his herd too, but we're going after mine. Get ready to leave!'

"By morning the next day, we'd all gotten back to the bunk house and loaded up what we wanted, and were on our way North to try and catch Bowdry. Every man had an extra hoss, and each hoss was the best that could be raised for us. Each man had more ca'tridges than he'd probably need, and we were on our way!

"Because we could make 40 or more miles a day on our hosses, and a trail herd hardly ever makes more than 10 miles in a day, we caught up with the Bowdry herd only five days from the ranch. We'd have caught up sooner but several other herds going through recent had confused us 'til we caught up with them and found they were'nt our men.

"When we finally sighted the Bowdry herd up ahead of us, the boss had us call a halt and rest, so's we could look over our guns and freshen our hosses. To do that, you wash the sweat from their sides with creek water. As a rule, a cowboy never does this 6 'til he's ready to stop at night and make his camp. This time, Bacon wanted to be sure that everything we had was prime for action. After everybody got through, we mounted and headed out towards the herd. The closer we got, the slower we got, and when we finally did get there, our mounts looked as if they hadn't been ridden so very far.

"Bowdry saw us coming, and sent his trail boss out to see what we wanted. That made Bacon feel all the more sure that here was his missing beef, so he tells the foreman to go back and tell Bowdry not to send another man out but to come himself. We saw Bowdry

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and the foremen talk together for awhile, and shake their heads like they were having an argument. Bacon caught Bowdry's eye, and motioned him out, riding halfway himself in the meanwhiel.

"Bowdry rode to meet him, and they had a talk out there. After a few minutes, Bowdry wheeled off to the herd, and Bacon waved us up to him. When we got up to him, he says, 'We're going to tally this herd, and boys, I want you to keep your eyes open for trouble.'

"By the time we reached the herd, where Bowdry cow punchers had stopped it, and we rode to the lead, where we begun our tally. Every one of us felt for sure that trouble's grandpappy was brewing, and sure kept his shooting iron in drawing position. Well, sir, that whole 3,000 head passed through, and there were two of Bacon's cow critters in it! What do you know about that! Just two of them. Nothing we could do about that, because all cattle will join any trail herd, and here was two that joined and weren't seen joining.

"There was some fine, free and fancy handshaking went on and we all had supper together, Bowdry's cooky throwing a real spread 7 for everybody. There's a picture I'll carry to my grave. About 75 cow pokes, all eating and drinking their strong black Java together, telling jokes, and pulling them, where four short hours before, and hours are short when you're near a killing, brother, the Bacon men's hands were just ready to draw and shoot every Bowdry man in sight, and Bowdry's men were just as ready to trigger the Bacon men to take up for their boss. And, if those Bowdry men had made up their minds that the Bacon men were going to rustle the herd and kill them anyway, they might have started shooting before we started the tally. Thank goodness, they didn't.

"It was on the way back from the Bowdry herd, that I saw a wild hoss off in the distance, and asked the bunch to help me catch him because I needed another hoss. When we got up to the rascal, he turned out to be a sort of a Canary yellow. There were so many of us that we had him treed in less than three hours. Every where he'd go, he'd see a man so he'd turn some other way, and we just finally surrounded him, and then closed in.

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"Well, sir. I come here to the rodeo to see some riding and roping. They certainly do some fine stuff here, but let me tell you, that riding them when they're so wild they've probably never ever seen a man before, is some riding. Some of them aren't so hard to best as others, but the easiest shade the bad ones of today. When the boys closed in on this hoss, Four or five of them lassoed him, and one of them slapped a hull on him while I took my shaps off. You see, in riding a buckner, you can't have much between your legs and the hoss because you hold on with your legs too.

"I jumped into the hull, one of them jerked the blindfold from his eyes, and the show was on. That was the best ride I ever 8 made in my life, and I've made a many a one. Not so awful many of my rides were on wild ones like that one, though. He pitched and rared around there something awful. I just had all I could do, to stay on him, and then I was almost throwed at least 20 times, then.

"When the ride was over, and he just hung his head after he bawled several times, a couple of the boys come over and helped me get off. I needed help bad, because I was a wreck. My knees had all the skin wore off, my nose had bled 'til I was weak from the loss of blood, my insides felt like somebody'd shot a bufler gun inside me, and my setter was sore as a boil. That ride lasted more than 15 minutes and 15 minutes in an inferno of the world's fastest moving action is months in any other kind of action. Why, here at the stock show, a ride only lasts seconds, and not even minutes. Then I stayed in that hull for 15 minutes!

"Then, on top of all that, I never did get him plum broke, because after we got back to the ranch, I went to work on him when I wasn't doing something else, but he'd trick every morning. I'd slap my hull on him, then mount him. Just as soon's I got set, he'd run backwards and fall on his back. There's a trick that's killed many a cow poke, but I was ready for anything, and when he went to falling, I'd leave the saddle, then when he started to get up, I'd be in it before he got straight, and he didn't lose me. You'd think he'd finally

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get hep that he couldn't hurt me that way, but he pulled it ever morning as long's I had him. Every morning!, but then he'd be good for the rest of the day. He was a good one, too.

"I left the Bacon spread when I was 17, and went to work for the Trinity Const. Co., of Trinidad Tex. I made good with them, and have a 150 acre ranch near Trinidad, where I raise fine beef like